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ABSTRACT

Building on the link between parents' education and children's academic achievement, the Families in Schools model of family literacy brings at-risk elementary school students and their parents together to learn in the elementary school setting. This book describes the model, presents the federal definition of family literacy, and argues that incorporating the Families in Schools model would be an effective strategy for improving student achievement and enhancing parent participation in their children's education. Further, the booklet details the components of the model and discusses how they are applied in the elementary school setting: (1) children's education; (2) adult education; (3) parent time; and (4) parent and child together time. Suggestions are given for developing successful family literacy programs at the elementary school level, including setting the school climate, integrating family literacy into the school culture, eliciting staff enthusiasm, planning teamwork, and recruiting and retaining families. Key roles for a high-quality Families in School program are described, including the district coordinator, school principal, elementary school teacher envoy, adult education teacher, and the parent liaison. The booklet concludes by asserting that current school reform efforts work to capitalize on a subtle but long-held tradition of family literacy and parent involvement and that this tradition must be at the forefront of public education to enrich the lives of today's children. (KB)

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Family Literacy in Elementary Schools

PS 029294

Creating Partnerships for Learning

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Creating Partnerships: The Families in Schools Model

The future success of our nation's children merits our highest expectations.

School reform efforts have long reflected these expectations, working diligently to improve opportunities for children—*all* children—through education.

But to level the educational playing field for our nation's children, we must level the playing field for their parents. We must have high expectations for all parents if we are to expect children to succeed.

Family literacy builds on the inextricable link between parents' education and children's academic achievement. The Families in Schools model of family literacy specifically brings at-risk elementary school children and their parents together to learn in the elementary school setting. While the primary goal of this reform initiative is to improve children's academic success, the venue to achieve this success is unique: increasing meaningful parent involvement by raising the educational attainment of parents. Key to the success of the Families in Schools model is a shift in focus from viewing parents as perfunctory supporters of their children to engaging parents as learners, providing them the skills and resources to become more integrally involved in their children's education.

The Families in Schools model was developed through a partnership between the National Center for Family Literacy, the Toyota Motor Corporation, and 15 public school districts across the country. Within three years, this pilot program has grown to include some 45 elementary schools, almost all of which are operating schoolwide Title I programs. Most have a large majority of their student population (80%-90%) who are eligible for free or reduced-price lunches. An important element of the Toyota Families in Schools initiative is an emphasis on collaboration at the local level, while also incorporating federal funding, to ensure program stability beyond the initial grant cycle.

Family literacy is a synergistic approach that draws on the strengths of families, schools and communities. The federal definition of family literacy, passed into law in 1998 through the Reading Excellence Act and other legislation, outlines the four essential components of comprehensive family literacy programs: adult education, children's education, interactive literacy activities for parents and their children, and parent training. This definition also emphasizes the importance of intensity, duration and integration of services,

Federal Definition of Family Literacy

"The term 'family literacy services' means services that are of sufficient intensity in terms of hours, and of sufficient duration, to make sustainable changes in a family, and that integrate all of the following activities:

(A) Interactive literacy activities between parents and their children.

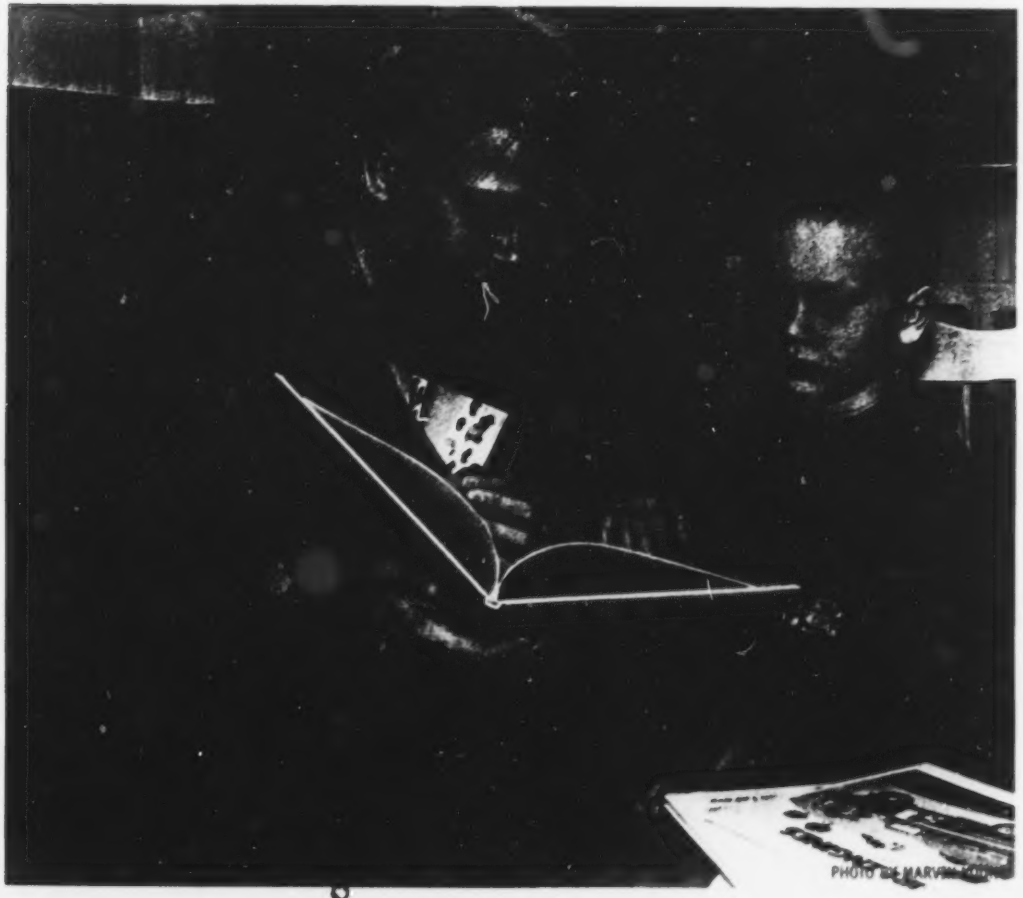
(B) Training for parents regarding how to be the primary teacher for their children and full partners in the education of their children.

(C) Parent literacy training that leads to economic self-sufficiency.

(D) An age-appropriate education to prepare children for success in school and life experiences."

to maximize the effectiveness of the individual learning components. The fully integrated family literacy approach is more powerful than the sum of its parts.

In the Families in Schools family literacy model, parents work toward individual academic goals during adult education classes, and their children attend regular elementary school classes. Parents also meet as a group to discuss children's literacy development, as well as other topics of interest to them, such as employment strategies or family health and nutrition. Finally, parents and children participate in Parent and Child Together (PACT) Time in the children's classrooms, taking part in literacy activities that promote a learning relationship. PACT Time, in conjunction with the other components of family literacy, not only increases parents' involvement in their children's education but also with the elementary school as a whole, forging stronger partnerships between teachers, staff and parents.



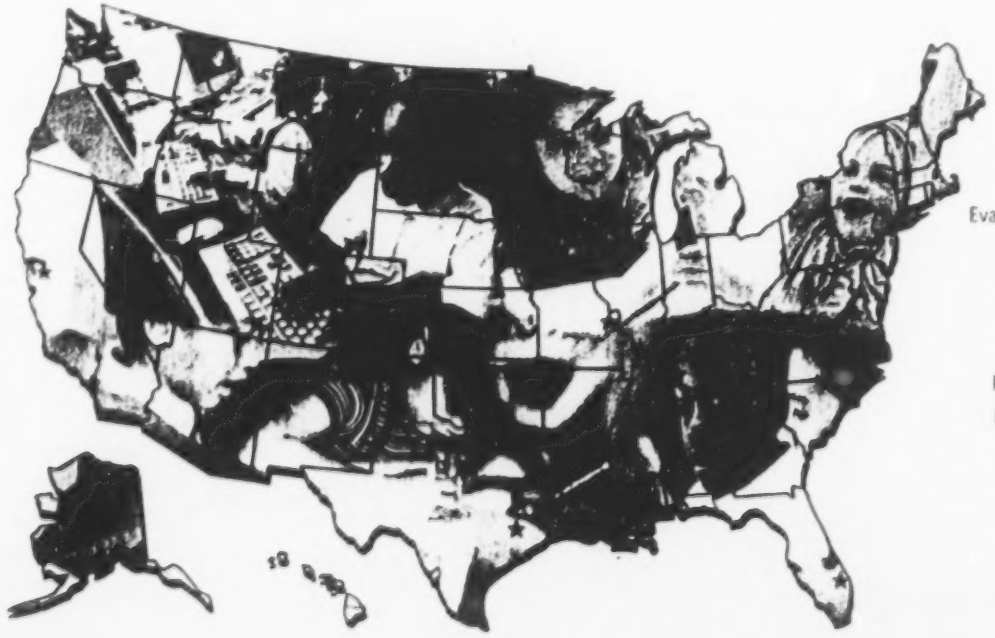
How does family literacy impact families and schools?

- Teachers implementing the Families in Schools model report that student behavior has improved and absenteeism has decreased. Family literacy is fostering a communicative relationship between teachers and parents, who are working together to create a learning community in their schools.
- Schools report an increase in parent volunteerism and attendance at PTA and PTO meetings, not just from parents

enrolled in the program but throughout the school community. As awareness of family literacy builds, more and more parents are becoming meaningfully involved in their children's education.

- Parents enrolled in Families in Schools programs report that they feel more comfortable in their children's schools. And while they are working toward achieving their own academic goals, they also report that they are increasing literacy activities with their children in their homes.
- Children are responding positively to having parents in the classroom and throughout the school, more consistently completing their homework, exhibiting greater attentiveness in class, and passing and moving on to the next grade level.

Communities are also getting more involved with their local schools. As public awareness of the Families in Schools model has grown, it's become clear that there is a broad spectrum of stakeholders in the nation who are committed to improving America's schools. Community events promoting family literacy in elementary schools have attracted the media, Boards of Education, School Boards Associations, school district leaders, state education leaders, governors, senators and representatives, community leaders, celebrities, former First Lady Barbara Bush, and—most importantly—parents.



School Districts Implementing the Toyota Families in Schools Model

Aurora Public Schools (Aurora, CO)
Broward County Public Schools (Ft. Lauderdale, FL)
Evansville-Vanderburgh School Corporation (Evansville, IN)
Fremont Unified School District (Fremont, CA)
Houston Independent School District (Houston, TX)
Jefferson County Public Schools (Louisville, KY)
Kanawha County Schools (Charleston, WV)
Los Angeles Unified School District (Los Angeles, CA)
Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools (Nashville, TN)
New Orleans Public Schools (New Orleans, LA)
Richmond City Public Schools (Richmond, VA)
Rochester City School District (Rochester, NY)
Seattle Public Schools (Seattle, WA)
St. Louis Public Schools (St. Louis, MO)
Sunnyside Unified School District (Tucson, AZ)

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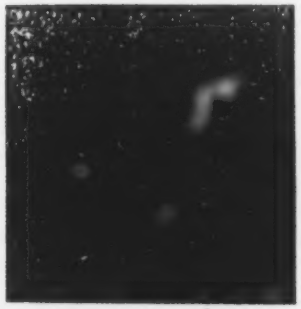
Making the Case for Families in Schools

"[Family literacy] gives a whole new meaning to getting parents involved in their children's education. Once parents become more familiar with their children's curriculum, teachers and staff, we will offer them assistance with everything from their children's homework to their own educational needs."

– Nancy Douglas, Director of Federal Programs, Kanawha County Schools, West Virginia



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Despite concentrated school reform efforts over the past 30 years, many reports show that students' achievement has made little if any improvement. Research also continues to point out that the educational attainment of a parent, which is often linked to the parent's economic status, is a major indicator of children's success or failure in school.

- From 1971 to 1999, there has been an overall decline in reading performance for children ages 13 and 17 whose parents' highest level of education is high school graduation. Reading scores of students ages 13 and 17 whose parents did not complete high school have not changed significantly since 1971. Among public school students, the average reading score of 9-year-olds was lower in 1999 than in 1980. (U.S. Department of Education. Office of Educational Research and Improvement. National Center for Education Statistics. *NAEP 1999 Trends in Academic Progress: Three Decades of Student Performance*, 2000.)
- In the National Survey of America's Families (1999), the Urban Institute reports that, in low-income families, 34% of children were highly engaged in school, compared to 45% of children in higher-income families. This gap was evident in both young children (ages 6-11) and adolescents (12-17). Of children ages 6-11 from low-income families, 10% exhibited high levels of behavioral and emotional problems, compared to 4% of children in families with higher incomes.
- According to the U.S. Department of Education, a substantial achievement gap remains between students in the highest- and lowest-poverty schools. Only 32% of students in the highest-poverty schools met or exceeded the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) basic level in reading, about half the rate nationally of students in all public schools. In math, 42% of students in the highest-poverty schools scored at or above the NAEP basic level, compared with 62% in all public schools. (*Promising Results, Continuing Challenges: The Final Report of the National Assessment of Title I*, 1999.)

Title I and other school reform efforts have increasingly recognized the value of parent involvement in promoting higher standards of children's academic achievement. The reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) in 1994 required that Title I schools and parents work together to develop compacts defining their responsibilities in providing and supporting children's education. In addition, local education agencies receiving a Title I allocation of $500,000 or more must use at least 1% of that funding on parent involvement activities.

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While Congress is currently working to again reauthorize ESEA, the 1994 reauthorization recommends 15 specific steps that schools and districts can take to enhance parent involvement strategies. Some of the compulsory activities outlined in the legislation are:

- Helping parents understand national policy objectives and state student performance standards.
- Providing parents with materials and training to help them support their children's achievement.
- Coordinating and integrating parent involvement initiatives with other programs, such as Head Start or Even Start (both of which provide family literacy services).
- Developing appropriate roles for community-based organizations and businesses in parent involvement activities, including encouraging the formation of partnerships between elementary, middle and secondary schools and businesses that include a role for parents.
- Conducting other activities, such as establishing parent resource centers and providing opportunities for parents to learn about child development.

By design, family literacy in the elementary school setting comprehensively integrates all of these strategies. In December 2000, Congress passed the Literacy Involves Families Together (LIFT) Act, which includes two amendments to Title I that further support family literacy as a strategy to increase student achievement. The first amendment encourages the use of Title I funds at the local level to provide family literacy services, if a Title I agency or school serves a substantial number of students whose parents have not graduated from high school or have low levels of literacy. The second amendment allows Even Start family literacy programs to serve children older than eight if schools use Title I funds to pay a portion of the cost of those services.

Schools certainly recognize that parent involvement is connected to student achievement, and many are making tremendous efforts to expand and enhance

"[Parents] have learned that there is nothing to fear from the people who educate their children, and that schools and families working together can be successful partners in education."

–José "Tony" Covarrubia, Principal, Summit View Elementary School, Tucson, Arizona

involvement activities. Unfortunately, many schools also recognize that, in lower-income families, there are often many deterrents that prevent meaningful parent involvement from taking place.

- In public schools, 62% of principals operating a schoolwide Title I program report that inadequacy of parent involvement is a barrier to the application of high standards to all students, compared to 42% of principals in schools not receiving Title I funds. In elementary schools specifically, 60% of principals operating schoolwide Title I programs report inadequacy of parent involvement as a barrier, compared to just 27% of principals in non-Title I schools. (National Center for Education Statistics, *Status of Education Reform in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools: Principals' Perspectives*, 1998.)
- In public elementary schools with a high concentration of poverty (50% or more of the student population eligible for federal lunch subsidies), 64% of schools perceived lack of parent education as a barrier to parent involvement, compared to 12% of low-poverty schools. (National Center for Education Statistics, *Parent Involvement in Children's Education: Efforts by Public Elementary Schools*, 1998.)

PHOTO BY LARRY COHEN

The Families in Schools model targets elementary schools operating Title I programs, to reach the most at-risk children and their families. While the average educational attainment of parents enrolled in the Toyota Families in Schools (TFS) programs in 1999-2000 was 10th grade, 82.3% of the families were living at or below the federal poverty line—or $13,470 annually for a family of three in 1999. Only 24% of the parents were employed, and those parents were earning an average of $7.08 an hour.

The average number of children per TFS household was three, and English was indicated as the primary language spoken in 48% of the homes of enrolled families. The top three goals that parents indicated they hoped to achieve by enrolling in the TFS program were to obtain the GED, become a better parent, and ensure that their children will have success at school in the future.

PHOTO BY

"This TFS [Toyota Families in Schools] program is a powerful program. We support the children in every way we can in this school, and this program is by far the most powerful program we have going. Where else will you get this amount of parent support? It's exciting. I have spent a lot of years looking for something that would make a lot of difference for our children, and this is it."

– Nancy Harrington, Principal, Durham Elementary School, Fremont, California

For more than 10 years, family literacy has been shown to be a powerful approach to increasing meaningful parent involvement in children's education by addressing adults' academic needs as well as children's.

- Parents who participate in the Family and Child Education (FACE) program, a family literacy program that works with American Indian families with children from birth to third grade, report high frequencies of home literacy activities. FACE parents of older elementary school-aged children continue to read to their children, tell stories to their children, and play with their children more frequently than do comparison parents. (Research and Training Associates, Inc., for the Office of Indian Education Program. *Bureau of Indian Affairs Family and Child Education Program: Evaluation Report*, 1998.)
- An NCFL Parent Study (1997) found significant gains in the frequency that parents who participated in family literacy programs talk to their school-aged children's teachers, volunteer at their children's school, talk to their children about their day, read or look at books with their children, take their children to the library, help their children with homework, and attend school activities.
- In the Toyota Families in Schools programs, enrolled parents have shown an increase in the amount of time they spend doing a variety of literacy-related activities with their children. Parents report spending more time telling their children stories, and the amount of books available in the home has increased. The number of hours parents reported that their children watched television decreased during the 1999-2000 program year, from 7 hours at the beginning of the year to 4.9 hours at the end of the year.

Parents who are actively involved in their children's education—who encourage literacy activities in the home, who seek out information about their children's progress in school by communicating with teachers, and who are exposed to a school environment that welcomes their participation and volunteer efforts—are likely to have a positive impact on their children's academic experience. Family literacy provides the tools for parents, through education and other resources, that help support meaningful parent involvement.

How Does Families in Schools Work?

Family literacy is built on the foundation of the four essential components. Elementary school family literacy programs are no different. They must allow ample time for all the components, and each must be integrated with the others to make the program truly comprehensive and thereby most effective.

Children's education. The primary goal of the Families in Schools model is to positively impact student achievement. The integration of the children's education component with the other components helps parents to understand what their children are learning and how they are learning, and better equips parents to support that learning in the home. Often, introducing parents into the children's classrooms has a positive impact on all the children in the class, not just the family literacy students. Elementary school teachers participating in family literacy education report

better attendance and improved behavior in their students, as well as an increase in homework completion.

Adult education. Adults and children learn in similar ways—a major difference is *why* they learn. The adult education component in family literacy offers instruction in literacy and English language skills, vocational skills, and also offers parents the opportunity to develop less tangible skills like problem solving and critical thinking. In family literacy programs, adult education instruction centers around the adult learners' individual goals and builds on their individual strengths. Importantly, parents enroll in family literacy programs (rather than adult-only educational programs) not only to improve their education but also to learn how to better support their children's education.

PHOTO BY MARVIN YOUNG

Adult Learners in Elementary Schools: Keys to Success

- Adult education instruction in family literacy programs emphasizes active learning opportunities, teaching skills in the context of real-life scenarios. Parents are even more motivated to learn when they can see how specific skills apply to their own lives.
- Computers are increasingly important in the adult education classroom. Not only can they aid classroom instruction, they also serve as great recruitment tools for adults, many of whom do not have access to computers at home or at work.
- Using a variety of incentives will encourage adults to continue in the program. Just as children feel validated when their hard work is rewarded, parents like to be recognized for their achievements, both short-term and long-term.
- Displaying adults' work in a visible area of the school not only honors their commitment to the program but also showcases lifelong learning for the rest of the school.
- One of the best ways to demonstrate the value of adult education to parents is by dedicating appropriate space and equipment to the adult education classroom.
- Assessment is just as important for adult education as it is for children's education. Use assessment to keep parents informed of their progress toward their goals.

Parent Time. This component focuses on topics of interest to parents—their children's literacy and social development, creating healthy home environments, or developing employability skills like communication and working as a member of a team. Often, Parent Time will be inspired by observations that parents make during Parent and Child Together (PACT) Time in their children's classrooms. In family literacy programs, Parent Time also provides an opportunity for parents, who sometimes feel isolated in poverty, to listen to one another, share their personal concerns and triumphs, and bond. In the elementary school setting, Parent Time can draw from the vast resources within the school including the personnel, such as the school nurse, counselors and the principal. Parent Time is also an excellent opportunity for parents to discuss and learn about how the school system works, to help them understand how they can best support their children's education.

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Parent and Child Together (PACT) Time. PACT Time in the elementary school is the most unique element of family literacy, because it breaks with traditional forms of parent involvement, providing an opportunity for parents to take part in their children's education in a more active way. It's especially effective in conjunction with the other components of family literacy, as a concrete support for the learning that takes place in the children's and adult classrooms.

As a laboratory for learning, PACT Time works simultaneously on several levels. In the classroom, parents and their children engage in an educational activity or experience together. While they are learning through the activity itself, parents are also observing how their children learn, how they are taught by the teacher, how they interact with

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other children, and how they interact with their teacher. Parents also are practicing their skills in support of their children's education, with guidance readily available from the classroom teacher.

The basic structure of PACT Time is fairly simple. Prior to entering the children's classrooms, parents plan with the adult educator, establishing a focus for each PACT Time session. Children also prepare for PACT Time with their elementary school teachers. During the actual PACT Time session, parents and their children participate together in an academic activity as the classroom teacher offers suggestions and models behavior. Following PACT Time, parents debrief with the adult educator, sharing their observations about their interactions and the teacher's interactions with their children, and reviewing academic standards and developmentally appropriate expectations for their children.

Key ingredients to a successful PACT Time include ongoing collaboration between the adult education teacher and the children's teachers in order to map out each session, preparing both parents and children to work together in the classroom, creating an inclusive climate for both parents and children, and assessment.

While PACT Time sessions can certainly occur during other events outside the classroom, such as take-home activities prepared by classroom teachers, field trips or school presentations, the core of the component should take place during regularly scheduled sessions in the children's classroom. Often, schools offer a combination of PACT Time opportunities during the school day and in afterschool sessions. In the Families in Schools model, there may be several elementary school teachers who are participating in PACT Time in their classrooms, and it is essential that each has a clear understanding of the goals and purposes of PACT Time and family literacy in general.

Classroom teachers' roles in PACT Time include observing, modeling appropriate behaviors for parents and children, helping parents and children get started on their plan, designing the classroom setting to support optimal interaction, planning group activities and transition-to-home lessons, and discussing and planning PACT Time with the adult education instructors during weekly team meetings.

Example of a PACT Time Lesson

In the Toyota Families in Schools program at Elvira Elementary in Tucson, PACT Time is part of the regular family literacy schedule every day. This program also offers an additional PACT Time on Wednesday afternoons. The following PACT Time took place during an afterschool session in the adult education classroom and centered around a science lesson that included several different activities for parents and children to do together.

- Prior to PACT Time, parents learned about and practiced science experiments with their adult education instructor.
- During the PACT Time session, parents acted as their children's teachers, drawing from their adult education experience as they helped explain the activities to their children. There were several stations set up around the room, each with activities, directions, supplies and discussion ideas. Children chose which activity they wanted to do first, and parents helped them conduct the experiments. After the students—parents and children—completed all the activities, the class came together as a group to discuss with the classroom teacher what they had learned.
- At the end of this PACT Time, the classroom teacher provided each family a packet of materials so that they could re-create the activities at home with other family members.

–developed by Maryanne Phininzy, adult education instructor, Tucson, Arizona

Planning for Success

Providing family literacy services in the elementary school is not meant to be an adjunct program tacked on to other school reform efforts. Rather, family literacy is most effective when it is truly ingrained in the school environment. Essential to the success of the Families in Schools model is planning for and encouraging the enthusiasm and support of staff, parents and children. Only when programs are administered with intensity, duration and integration can they foster sustainable changes in families.

Setting the school climate. Family literacy takes its cue from the learning partnerships that form necessarily in support of children's education—the partnership between parent and child, the partnership between parent and teacher, the partnership between adult instructor and elementary school teacher, and the partnership between parent and school. Some of these partnerships, however, need supplemental nurturing, especially for families who are facing multiple challenges. Parents in particular may feel uncomfortable in the elementary school because of negative past experiences, low self-esteem or language barriers. There are many ways schools can plan for and create a welcoming environment for parents. Holding orientation meetings with staff and open houses for parents will help to establish a clear understanding of the goals of the family literacy program. Providing appropriately-sized furniture for adults, using culturally relevant decorations, and offering informational materials in the native languages of the families will help to foment a trusting relationship between parents and schools. Welcome parents not only in the classrooms but also in the hallways, libraries and cafeteria.

Integrating family literacy into the school culture. The overall goals of a family literacy program typically align with school and district goals while supporting academic standards for adults and children. To ensure the success of an elementary school family literacy program, it's important that everyone on staff understands how family literacy helps the entire school achieve its objectives. Sharing information about the family literacy program on an ongoing basis in school staff meetings, recognizing the accomplishments of family literacy students at schoolwide events, and working to create a welcoming environment throughout the school will help to integrate the program. Adult educators and parent liaisons should participate in school events alongside elementary school educators so that they can help to integrate all of family literacy's components into the school culture.

Eliciting staff enthusiasm. The best way to encourage staff's enthusiasm is by keeping them informed and involved. Implementing family literacy successfully requires the support of everyone on staff, who can help to recruit families, may be able to invite parents into their classrooms, or may be able to help parents feel more welcomed just by saying hello as they pass in the hallways. The more the elementary school staff know and understand family literacy, the better they will be able to support it.

Planning teamwork. Teamwork is at the heart of family literacy as learning partnerships are enhanced and strengthened. Team planning among all the educators in a family literacy program should happen frequently and regularly, at least once a week. Administrators can help by integrating

team planning time into the regular work schedule. As parents see teachers working together, they will better understand the synergy of family literacy.

Recruiting and retaining families. Recruiting families is a challenge often faced by programs that target the most at-risk population. Many families who are eligible for family literacy services face multiple barriers to committing to a long-term program. Some parents may be wary of returning to the school setting if they had unsuccessful educational experiences in the past. For parents with low literacy skills, creative methods of recruitment that don't rely on printed words may be necessary. Ultimately, though, all parents want their children to succeed in school, and this will be the primary motivator for parents to enroll in a Families in Schools program.

Recruitment should always be done with retention as the goal—commitment is as important as attendance. The quality and outcomes of the program, how well it meets parents' expectations and goals, will directly affect retention.

Unlike children, parents don't have to go to school. To keep them enrolled in a family literacy program, they have to *want* to go. Find out what parents' needs and interests are and design curriculum that helps them obtain their goals. Principals make strong recruiters, as their top-level support lends credence to the whole program. But perhaps most importantly, teachers have tremendous influence over recruitment and retention efforts, as they interact daily with parents and their children.

Recruitment and Retention Ideas

- Create a welcoming environment and staff in the adult education classroom and the children's classroom, and throughout the school
- Celebrate benchmarks, recognize and reward attendance with certificates or other awards, and provide incentives for continued commitment such as field trips or items that have been donated
- Provide opportunities to include parents' input, to help them recognize that their suggestions are valued
- Recognize the program and participants through the PTA, the PTO or other committees, and at schoolwide events
- Provide child care during program hours for parents with younger children
- Provide free or reduced-price transportation
- Provide free or reduced lunch or breakfast for parents as well as children (check with your state for eligibility)
- Offer home visits (supplying PACT Time literacy activities for the whole family) and follow-up services
- Keep the school community and the community at large aware of the program through school bulletin boards, newsletters, church and community bulletins
- Engage the media (radio, television, newspapers)
- Design brochures and posters that are attractive and in the languages of the target population and post them in high traffic areas such as apartment complexes, churches and community centers, grocery stores and laundromats
- Network with other family literacy programs in the community and collaborate with welfare office for referrals
- Keep families connected over the summer with special activities, events and extended program class sessions
- Encourage teachers to talk with their students' parents—teachers are extremely valuable recruiters
- Encourage parents in the program to talk with other parents—build on the informal network of parents
- Go door to door

"I think that the TFS [Toyota Families in Schools] program realigns school culture by including parents as students within the same environment where their children are students. This coexistence of teachers and learners helps to create a more equal partnership between parents and teachers. Parents are not outsiders or occasional visitors to the school; they are part of the school. TFS becomes the change agent for families who have fallen in the shadow of poverty...a change agent that leads them into the light of educational opportunity and success."

–Judy Kiley, Family Literacy Program Coordinator, Rochester City School District

Identifying Key Roles

A high-quality Families in Schools program requires the input, expertise—and legwork—of a number of people at the district and school-building levels. But the success of a family literacy program hinges on the dedication and advocacy of several key players. Importantly, the program needs to have at least one stalwart champion, who visibly and persistently demonstrates the value of the program to the rest of the school and district staff.

The five roles listed here have been identified as crucial to the success of the Families in Schools model. Some schools may have staff capable of fulfilling these roles under a slightly different title.

District Coordinator. The District Coordinator serves as the primary administrator for the family literacy initiative, coordinating efforts among all the program sites, gathering and disseminating best practices, providing staff development opportunities, guiding evaluation and continuous improvement, and helping to tie together all the pieces of family literacy. In addition to working with program staff, encouraging and participating in team planning, the District Coordinator will also work closely with other community agencies and school district departments such as Title I, Curriculum and Instruction, and Transportation, to ensure the smooth delivery of services to families. Another responsibility for the District Coordinator in a family literacy program is to monitor assessments to ensure that the program is making progress toward achieving both program goals and the goals of the school district. This role needs to be carried out by someone who is a great communicator for the program—in the school, the community, and the district.

School Principal. The principal builds the program into the overall school plan, weaving family literacy throughout the fabric of the school environment. Perhaps the principal's greatest role is as advocate, speaking about the program to the entire school staff and helping them understand how the program supports school and district goals. Principals also demonstrate to parents how much their involvement is valued, and actively recruit parents into the program. Efforts on the part of the principal in ensuring that adequate space and time are dedicated to all the components of family literacy will help to integrate the program into the school environment.

Elementary School Teacher Envoy. All classroom teachers are essential to incorporating family literacy into the elementary school environment, encouraging parents to participate and making them feel welcome. What has proven especially helpful, though, is for one elementary school teacher to assume the role of envoy. This person can represent elementary school teaching staff in program planning meetings, and vice versa—representing the family literacy program to the rest of the school staff via a respected elementary school teacher perspective. Under ideal

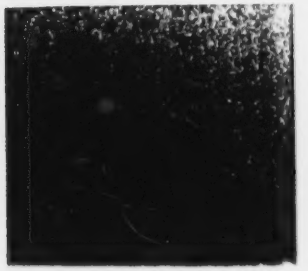
circumstances, the adult education teacher will plan directly with all the classroom teachers who have Families in Schools children in their classrooms. But when this can't occur, perhaps due to scheduling conflicts, the teacher envoy will help to bridge communication between the adult education teacher and other classroom teachers.

Adult Education Teacher. The adult education teacher plays a pivotal role in making family literacy work. The adult education teacher spends the most consistent time with parents, who are their families' decision makers. When parents feel that they are meeting their goals, they are more likely to continue in the program, and family literacy, like most education programs, only works when it endures. First and foremost, the adult education teacher offers basic skills and literacy instruction, supporting parents in their efforts as individual learners. The adult education teacher also helps prepare parents to work in their children's classrooms, helping the children's teachers prepare to welcome parents into their classrooms as well. And in addition to providing instruction, adult education teachers can help decode the elementary school system for parents, including parents who speak languages other than English.

Parent Liaison. The parent liaison supports parents in both educational and non-educational endeavors, helping them understand the features of the family literacy program and how it can help them reach their goals. Key to the parent liaison role's effectiveness is making parents feel comfortable in the elementary school setting and advocating for them throughout the school. The parent liaison works with parents to remove barriers to enrolling and remaining in the program, and also helps connect them to other services and resources in the community. Subsequently, it is especially helpful when the parent liaison has strong ties to the community and is someone parents trust implicitly. The role of parent liaison may be filled by a variety of personnel, such as a Title I parent specialist, a school counselor, or a family resource center coordinator.

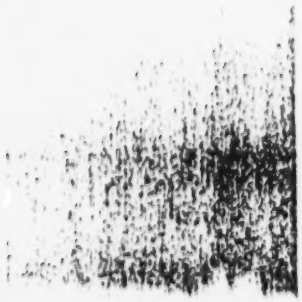
"I cannot walk my hallways and say, 'well, I don't have enough time.' I have to create time. That's why we have meetings once a week. If I don't meet with my teacher coordinators, if I don't meet with my Adult Ed [teacher], if I don't meet with my Parent Liaison, they will soon feel that I don't care. And once they feel that my heart isn't in it, their hearts cannot be in it."

–Bob Yancy, Principal, Cupples Elementary School, St. Louis



"I think it's significant that students who were involved in PACT Time by far showed more growth than any other child in my classroom. They jumped two or three grade levels in reading. That's from reading with parents in the classroom, and the whole communication involved. The relationship, and seeing the parent in the room, I think, has carried over to the home."

–Ernesto Badillo, elementary school teacher, Tucson, Arizona



Family Literacy: Supporting Partnerships for Learning

Supporting Teachers

Encouraging parents to become more fundamentally involved in their children's education has many rewards that teachers are quick to recognize. Improved behavior of students, better attendance and consistently completed homework are among the benefits that teachers in the Toyota Families in Schools program have repeatedly reported. Teachers have also found that as parents learn more about the teacher's role in their children's education, they become more supportive of the educational staff's efforts as a whole.

In Seattle, teachers have expressed their interest in increasing parent involvement throughout the school as they've witnessed children who were at risk of failing pass to the next grade. In New Orleans, children work diligently in their classes, staying on task and behaving well so that they earn the "very special privilege" of working with their parent. Classroom teachers who participate in PACT Time report that their students tend to be more attentive and complete homework assignments more frequently.

Parents in Los Angeles and Tucson demonstrated their high regard for the education staff through special events focusing on teacher appreciation, including a celebration for the entire faculty in a Los Angeles elementary school and a luncheon for all school personnel organized in Tucson as part of Teacher Appreciation Week.

Supporting Schools

A well-implemented and integrated family literacy program extends meaningful parent involvement beyond the families enrolled in the program to the whole school community. Not only does the Families in Schools model foster collaboration between parents and the school, evidenced by increased volunteerism and parent attendance at events and meetings, but also between the school and the community.

A flourishing new Toyota Families in Schools program in Aurora, Colorado, boasts that 50 parents responded to a call for volunteers to help with vision screening. The school staff attributes this success to parents becoming more comfortable within the school setting due to the implementation of family literacy services on-site. Afterschool events are also meeting with great success. In a Houston elementary school, a "Passport for Learning" family night attracted more than 250 parents and children, and a family dinner and education night at a Louisville elementary school hosted some 150 parents. In Nashville, a "Family Day" that provided educational and social activities was

attended by 300 parents and children, while a parent/teacher dinner in Richmond was used to introduce family literacy services to the more than 125 parents who attended.

Schools are also enjoying an increase in community awareness of their efforts to help families. In Evansville, Indiana, Families in Schools programs are collaborating with the Families and Children's Services (FCS), an organization that provides counseling, life skills classes for children and families, and family outreach for the Evansville Housing Authority. Teaming up with the Families in Schools programs has boosted the services available to families, particularly as coordinated with the adult education teachers and parent liaisons. A relatively new program in Ft. Lauderdale has been able to combine funds from Toyota with funding from the Barbara Bush Foundation and an Annenberg challenge grant to bolster their efforts early on. And in Charleston, West Virginia, school officials and community leaders formed the Kanawha County Family Literacy Coalition to bring together people and agencies serving families or supporting literacy. The Coalition helped orchestrate a big media event at one Families in Schools site, attended by Governor Cecil H. Underwood and other community leaders, to raise awareness of the program and the school.

Supporting Parents

There are many appreciable examples of how parents in elementary school family literacy programs have improved their own academic skills and how they are actively supporting their children's education. But equally important, schools are finding creative and resourceful ways to reach out to parents, working to make it easier for parents to participate.

In Fremont, California, the Families in Schools program took a direct approach to recruiting parents who might benefit from family literacy services. Before the program began, school staff identified children "most in need" of additional assistance based on their SAT-9 scores. The parent liaison contacted each of these children's families and explained the Families in Schools program. Following this personal contact, a parent orientation meeting was held to further share information about the program. The individualized attention the parents received resulted in high enrollments for the initiative, which now operates three daytime and three evening programs.

To accommodate parents' varied schedules, three elementary school sites in Los Angeles looked closely at parents' needs and developed three different schedules for their programs: one in the morning, one in the afternoon, and one in the evening. The morning program brings parents into their children's classrooms during regularly scheduled classes. The afternoon program plans PACT Time activities for parents and children in the parents' classroom. In the evening program, after parents attend ESL classes, they join their children to participate in PACT Time.

"Along with our teachers, who serve as the cornerstone for student learning, the key to this school district's success is our parents. Simply put, involved parents lead to involved students and this, friends, results in better schools and higher achievement. Educational excellence is a 'we' activity, a shared responsibility."

–Albert J. Williams, Ed.D., Superintendent, Richmond Public Schools, Virginia

"I feel that my mom really does care about my work. And I feel proud of my mom because she's really interested in the stuff I do. I'm getting better grades because my mom helps me—the teacher helps her, and she helps me, so I'm learning more day by day."

-Amalia, age 8,
Tucson, Arizona

Many parents struggle with the multiple demands of maintaining the delicate balance between family life and work, and often have limited resources available to them. In St. Louis, one school was able to provide a washer and dryer on-site, so that parents, many of whom work in addition to attending the family literacy program, can save a little time by taking care of their laundry while they are in class. The school was also able to get detergent donated by local business partners. In Houston, parent centers called "Project Reconnect" offer computer labs and provide "make and take" classes for parents to create materials to use at home for interactive, intergenerational learning activities. And in Rochester, the staff recognized that lifelong learning doesn't take a summer vacation. The Families in Schools program was able to extend services to adults through the summer, offering parents special courses in computer training and retail and marketing.

Supporting Children

Improving educational outcomes for children is what family literacy in elementary schools is all about. But even as they make gains in their academic achievement, children in family literacy programs enjoy new experiences and absorb almost inexpressible benefits from newly formed partnerships in learning.

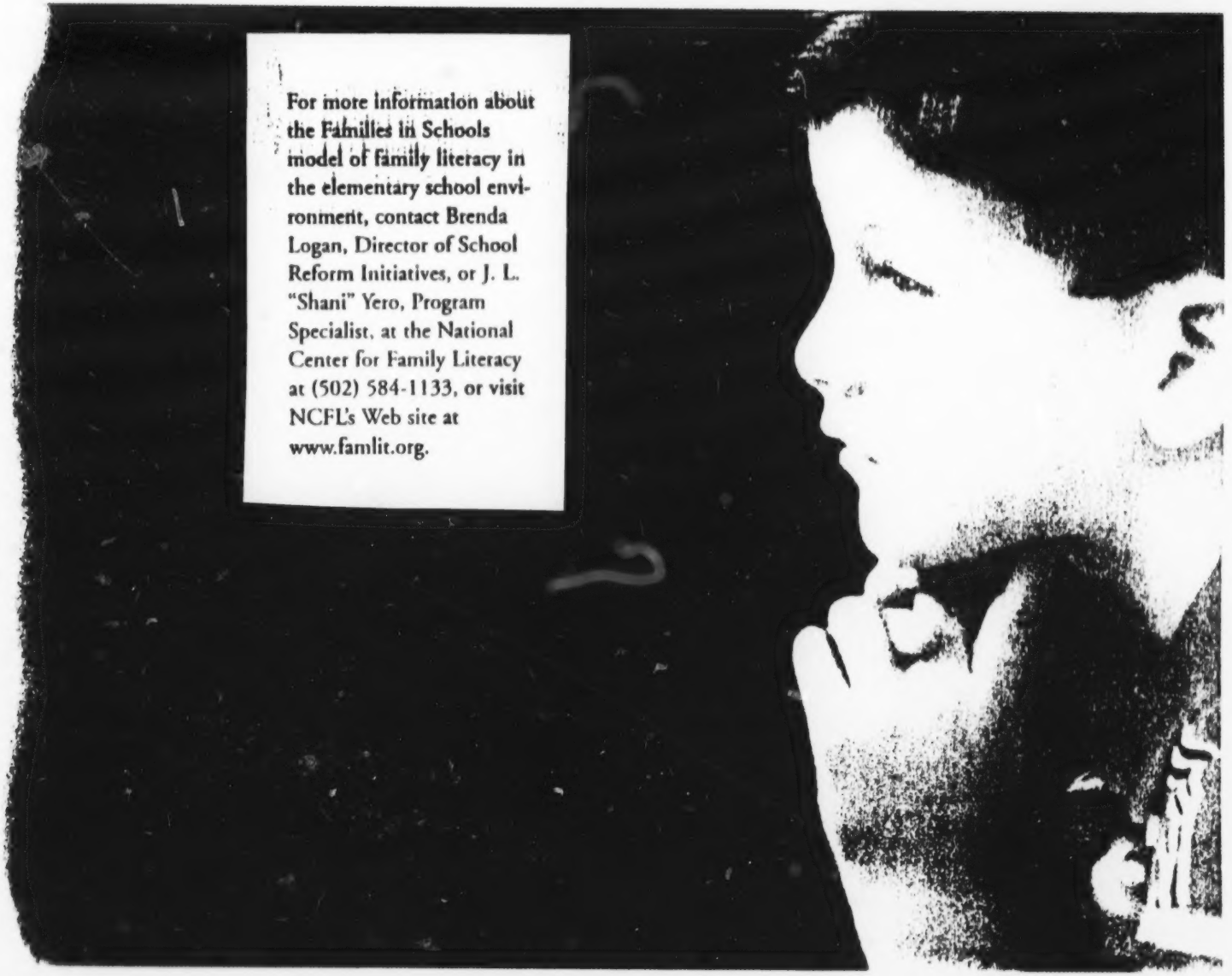
In one Seattle classroom, a child had many developmental needs coupled with severe social-emotional problems. Having her mother at school with her has had a very positive effect—she is now beginning to participate in small group lessons and is trying new activities, a huge step forward for the child. In another classroom in Nashville, a fourth grader was having difficulty paying attention and remembering verbal instructions. As mom took part in PACT Time in the child's classroom, the teacher suggested some activities they could work on at home to cultivate these skills. Now the student is able to focus on instruction and is even volunteering to answer questions. In Rochester, children in family literacy programs were able to enroll in summer day camp, an opportunity most had never experienced before.

Shanelle Peoples, a parent in Richmond, Virginia, who is studying to achieve her GED, says "there are a lot of things I want to do for my family and me. I want to build a foundation for my children." Shanelle also said that now she can help her fifth grader do algebra. She works with her third grader on longitude and latitude. And her four-year-old is beginning to read...

Partnerships for the Future

Elements of family literacy and parent involvement have long been a subtle tradition in the American school system. School reform efforts have worked to capitalize on this tradition, and research and practice continue to show that this tradition must be brought to the forefront of public education, to enrich the lives of today's children and the lives of generations to come.

For more information about the Families in Schools model of family literacy in the elementary school environment, contact Brenda Logan, Director of School Reform Initiatives, or J. L. "Shani" Yero, Program Specialist, at the National Center for Family Literacy at (502) 584-1133, or visit NCFL's Web site at www.famlit.org.



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